

Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

I want to thank this committee for raising this bill once again in a strengthened form. I also want to thank the members of the community college caucus for throwing their support behind this bill. We've been trying to get a version of this through for years now. I'm exhausted. Maybe you're exhausted. But this is essential and it is our job as educators in public service who know what the real effects of this consolidation are and will be to do everything we can to save the state from its effects.

A couple of years ago, the then-president of CSCU sat before this committee and vowed that he would do what was necessary to not close a single community college even though we were facing financial limitations. The solution he proposed was to *close all twelve*. I have yet to understand how that could be seen as a solution but here we are. Had we gone down the road of closing a college or two we'd never have succeeded. Legislators in the district would have owned the problem and pushed back accordingly. In spreading the solution across the state, it diffused both the threat and the responsibility.

It may seem as if this state-wide blanket approach is in some way more equitable, but policies within this consolidated college risk disadvantaging some students more than others. What is particularly problematic is that the students most disadvantaged by the policies are the very students who are the core mission of our community colleges- working adults, part timers, students returning to college after a life interruption- often with college debt and no degree, students who aren't yet ready to take on college-level work and who, in the past, we have offered developmental courses appropriate to their challenges.

Providing quality education, especially when we are addressing great disparities and inequities in lower grades, is not cheap. It requires resources in the form of both funding and experts. This was acknowledged in PA12-40 when revisions to our developmental courses were imposed by the legislature- there was funding and expertise devoted to the cause and, painful as it might have been years of work was put into the transition. The consolidated college's approach to developmental education allocates no funding to its implementation and specifically bars the experts in that level of instruction from teaching those courses. The PA-1240 committee- a group of people who would have much wisdom to contribute- has been disbanded and is not being used as a resource. The model for developmental education that the consolidated college has adopted requires students who are not yet college ready to do what it takes to catch up while enrolled in college level courses, making it unreasonably challenging for even the least time-constrained students and practically impossible for our working students with families.

In 2011, the merger of the colleges and universities into the CSCU system provided an opportunity for transfer articulation and increased partnership between colleges and universities, but this sabotaging of the quality of education available in the community colleges threatens to undo that close linking. This is significant- for example, the vast majority of CCSU graduates earned at least some of their credits at a community college. A lack of confidence- as exists now- in our foundational college level courses threatens to undermine that partnership.

Each year, the legislature funds the system with block grants allocated to the colleges and to the universities with only a small amount to fund operations at the system office, but does anyone have any idea how much money actually gets to the colleges and how much is retained at the system office? Our central administration has grown so large that we've acquired a second system office in New Britain while the student services offices struggle with the challenges of understaffing at the very same time.

CSCU leadership promised economies of scale and efficiency in sharing 'back-office' functions across all twelve colleges, but those savings have yet to be seen. Instead of efficiency we see duplicated functions in a bloated and circuitous bureaucratic processes. Decisions are made at a great distance from the people we serve, projections presented with no evidence to support them and in spite of the abundant evidence experienced educators offer to the contrary.

Having failed to save money, the consolidation is now advertised as in pursuit of equity- but I've addressed that to some extent and others testifying today have said more to the lie in that claim.

It's not saving money. It --by its very design and in the specifics of its implementation-- is counter to the demands of equity. What is it doing?

My position: This is theft. From working people who pay their taxes and will not be afforded the path forward that was offered to previous generations. It is a contraction of state services from a student body that is majority black, brown and poor. And it is being implemented with all the wisdom and sensitivity that would be expected of people governing at a great distance from the people they claim to serve.

It is not the job of a small unelected body to determine the quality of public education and public services in our state. It is not the job of an accreditor to determine what's best for our future. Realize that a branch campus' offerings can be eroded to the point of nonexistence as a matter of internal management once that location loses independent accreditation as a college. This bill gives legislators the opportunity to take responsibility and to know enough about the real effects of restructure or closure so that no legislator will ever have to tell their constituents that they did not know and will be able to intervene before it's too late. It is almost too late for all of our state community colleges.